

REMARKS FROM ANTWAN JACKSON PRESS CONFERENCE

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I. Introduction

Good morning and thank you all for being here. My name is Tim Heaphy and I am the United States Attorney for the Western District of Virginia.

We are here today to talk about the case of Antwan Jackson, who was sentenced this morning to life in prison for killing Johnell Greene back in 2006 in Orange, Virginia. This is an appropriately harsh punishment for a serious crime. I want to talk a bit about the case that led to this lengthy sentence.

But I don't want to stop there, because Mr. Jackson's sentencing provides an occasion to discuss the important issue of equal treatment under law. This case shows that this office and the Department of Justice treat all violence -- indeed all crime -- the same, regardless of the status of the victim. Everyone is equal in the eyes of the law. I want everyone in this community to know that our work reflects that important, fundamental principle.

II. United States v. Antwan Jackson

In the summer of 2006, Lindsay Drive was a neighborhood in Orange, Virginia that was essentially an open air drug market. There is an apartment complex on that street that became a drug supermarket. Buyers from all over the area would come to Lindsay Drive to purchase crack cocaine.

The drug market on Lindsay Drive was controlled by an organized criminal enterprise that operated like any other business. The manager of this drug supermarket was a man named Antwan Jackson, who had grown up not far from Lindsay Drive. Mr. Jackson set up and supervised the entire operation. He acquired the product from sources outside of Orange. He then distributed the product through a network of employees - young men who sold crack on Lindsay Drive and later paid Mr. Jackson. Two of Mr. Jackson's brothers worked for him, operating as his "shop foremen" on Lindsay Drive. This was organized crime, and it was very profitable for Mr. Jackson and his employees.

Unlike other businesses, drug dealing is inherently dangerous. Drug sellers are targets for robbery, and they are constantly at risk of arrest and incarceration. Antwan Jackson and his men were aware of those risks, and they took steps to protect themselves. They carried firearms and defended their turf and their product. They also tried to monitor police activity and identify folks who came to buy crack who they thought might be working with police.

Johnell Greene was one of the regular customers of this drug supermarket. He was a daily drug user who sometimes bought crack from Mr. Jackson's employees. He eventually became a threat to the business - which ultimately led to his murder.

In June of 2006, Johnell Greene and another man stole a package of crack cocaine from one of Antwan Jackson's crack cocaine dealers. While he was not the one who was robbed, Antwan Jackson took that theft personally. The day after the robbery, Jackson told the drug employee who had been robbed to "handle" Greene or Jackson would "handle" the employee. Jackson's employee responded by finding Greene in the parking lot of the Lindsay Drive apartments and shooting at him, narrowly missing.

After this attempt on his life, Johnell Greene went to jail in Orange. While he was in jail, he told detectives about the attempt on his life. He identified the shooter and Antwan Jackson, which resulted in the shooter being arrested for attempted murder.

When Antwan Jackson learned that his employee had been arrested, he knew that Johnell Greene had cooperated. He knew that Mr. Greene had become an even more serious threat to the lucrative drug business, because he was a "snitch." Antwan Jackson hated "snitches," as they put his livelihood at risk. He decided that he couldn't take that risk, and he vowed to eliminate the risk posed by Johnell Greene.

On August 11, 2006, Johnell Greene was released from jail. He immediately returned to his neighborhood - the Lindsay Drive apartments. Several of Jackson's associates were in the area, doing what they always did - selling drugs. They saw Greene and immediately notified their boss - Antwan Jackson.

Antwan Jackson saw opportunity and decided to act. He couldn't let Johnell Greene stay on the street. Mr. Greene had robbed the drug business. Then he "snitched." That was in effect a "double whammy" threat. Jackson told one of his drug dealers "I'm coming." He instructed his employee to tell everyone to go inside and get off the street. They complied. By 10:00 p.m. that night, Lindsay Drive was unusually quiet. It would not remain quiet for long.

When he heard Johnell Greene was out of jail and on Lindsay Drive, Antwan Jackson seized the moment. He drove from his residence in Staunton, Virginia directly to Orange. He was dressed in dark clothing, and he carried a .40 caliber semi-automatic pistol. He went to Lindsay Drive, looking for Johnell Greene. He hid in the bushes behind the apartment complex, waiting for his opportunity to act.

Shortly before midnight on August 11, 2006, he got that opportunity. Johnell Greene and two of his cousins were walking across the parking lot of the Lindsay Drive apartments on their way to a party. Antwan Jackson came out of the woods and ambushed Mr. Greene. He shot Johnell Greene 10 times in the back, hips, thighs and legs. He fired the final shots standing over Mr. Greene, who lay dying on the pavement behind the apartment buildings. His grisly act complete, Mr. Jackson ran to his parked car and drove back to Staunton, where he got rid of the murder weapon.

Immediately after the murder of Johnell Greene, suspicion fell on Antwan Jackson. Several witnesses to the shooting knew Mr. Jackson and gave his name to police. Mr. Jackson knew that this was serious, and that law enforcement would soon knock on his door to ask him where he was that night.

So he tried to set up a false alibi. He asked his girlfriend, the mother of his then 1-month old daughter, to lie for him and tell the police that he was home with her that night. She agreed and did so - initially telling the police that Antwan Jackson was in Staunton with her that night. Jackson also paid one of his drug associates in Staunton to provide support for that alibi. The associate agreed and backed up the girlfriend's story.

Antwan Jackson went to prison shortly after the murder, but he was charged only with violating his probation. From his jail cell, Jackson continued to supervise his drug business. He specifically instructed his girlfriend and others to retrieve a large amount of cocaine and several firearms from a storage facility he maintained in Orange. Antwan Jackson was soon out of prison, and he resumed his drug selling business. He moved that business to Staunton, Virginia, as the murder had made it difficult for him to continue to sell drugs on Lindsay Drive. In 2007, Jackson was arrested on federal drug charges stemming from sales in Staunton, Virginia. He pleaded guilty to those charges and received a 10-year sentence.

He probably thought at that point or soon thereafter that he had gotten away with murder. His girlfriend had lied on his behalf, giving him a false alibi. He had destroyed the murder weapon. Time passed, and no charges were filed.

That all changed in late 2009, when the Commonwealth Attorney for Orange County, Diana Wheeler, came to my office in this building. The Commonwealth Attorney asked us to reopen the now cold homicide case involving the murder of Johnell Greene. She said that the Greene family wanted justice, and she asked that our office get involved in the case and try to bring it to justice.

We decided to say yes to Ms. Wheeler. We quickly put together a team of investigators led by ATF Agent Michael Talbert and Orange County Detective Chris Pontius. Deputy Commonwealth Attorney Rick Moore agreed to work with me in the investigation.

Together, this team started reinterviewing witnesses and piecing together the events that occurred back in 2006 on Lindsay Drive. We were able to get important new evidence, largely from some of Antwan Jackson's drug selling employees. We obtained the cooperation of his two brothers, both of whom eventually pleaded guilty to their roles in the drug business. We also obtained the truthful cooperation of Mr. Jackson's girlfriend and the other alibi witness, both of whom told us that they had lied on his behalf years ago.

In September of 2010 - more than 4 years after the murder - we indicted Mr. Jackson for running the drug business on Lindsay Drive and for killing Johnell Greene. We charged him with obstructing justice and suborning perjury.

Mr. Jackson elected to fight those charges, which led to a very emotional trial in April of this year. In that trial, we presented the testimony of Mr. Jackson's two brothers, each of whom recounted their drug business and their brother's admissions about killing Johnell Greene. They did so reluctantly, sometimes through tears, as they were mindful of the impact of their testimony. This was brother against brother - human drama on a scale that we seldom see in criminal cases.

We also presented the testimony of Antwan Jackson's former girlfriend, who described her earlier attempts to lie for him out of concern that her daughter would never have a father. She, too, testified reluctantly. She knew that her truthful testimony likely ensured that her daughter would grow up without a father.

A jury heard all of the evidence that our investigative team gathered, and they found Mr. Jackson guilty of every charged count. They believed his brothers and his former girlfriend. And they convicted him of everything - running a drug business, obstructing justice, and most importantly the murder of Johnell Greene.

Today in United States District Court, Mr. Jackson was sentenced to life in prison. Judge Moon's sentence ensures that Mr. Jackson will never again be a free man. He will remain forever inside a federal prison. He will leave that prison only upon his own death. This is a harsh but just result - the only fair response to the awful crimes Mr. Jackson committed.

I want to stop for a minute and thank the dedicated team of agents, investigators and prosecutors who are responsible for this result. First, ATF Special Agent Mike Talbert and Detective Chris Pontius of the Orange County Police Department were primary investigators in this matter. They interviewed dozens of people about these events. They located physical evidence and tracked down every possible lead. Their hard work and perseverance led to the ultimate charge and conviction of Antwan Jackson. They kept the faith for years, even in the midst of other cases and competing priorities.

Deputy Commonwealth Attorney Rick Moore was an able assistant in this matter. He devoted countless hours to witness interviews, grand jury presentation, and review of the evidence. He ultimately tried the case with me after we deputized him as a Special Assistant United States Attorney.

This case is a good example of the results that come from effective cooperation between federal and local law enforcement. This was a team effort, one that drew upon the hard work of people at every level. I want to thank all of you for your commitment to this case, and congratulate you on the successful outcome.

Finally, I want to recognize Shirley Atkins. She is Johnell Greene's mother, and she is with us today as she has been for literally every minute of every court proceeding in this matter. Ms. Atkins, again, I am so sorry for your loss. While I know this case and this sentence does not bring your son back, I hope the knowledge that the man who brutally killed Johnell will spend the rest of his life in a prison cell offers some closure. I want to thank you for your strength, and for your belief in us.

III. Every Victim Matters

In every murder case, there is a victim. A victim who will never again feel the sun on his face, never again hear his favorite song, never again hug a loved one.

In every murder case there is a family left behind to grieve. A family that will never see that smiling face again, hear that joke or hug their lost loved one.

That sad reality is true wherever the victim lives, whatever mistakes he has made, and whatever circumstances led to his murder. When violence takes the life of any man, it is a terrible human tragedy. The gravity of that tragedy should not depend on the color of the victim's skin, the amount of money he has, his educational background, or where he lives.

Johnell Greene was no saint. He was a drug user who stole from others. He had made mistakes in his life. He was also a devoted son, a playful companion, a kind soul who helped others. Most importantly, he was a man - like any other man.

Johnell Greene's mistakes did not give Antwan Jackson permission to kill him. No man deserves to be shot down in cold blood and left to die in a parking lot. Nobody deserves that - no matter what mistakes they make in life.

Far too often the public hears stories like Johnell's and has a jaded reaction. This kind of violence is explained away as one drug-dealer killing another in a poor neighborhood. It can be viewed as an unfortunate reality that we must accept. Nobody gives crimes like this a second thought.

But we do.

To me and the people with whom I work in this office and the Department of Justice, the value of a human life does not depend on neighborhood, socio-economic status, or lifestyle. Murder is murder, and violence is violence.

This case shows that the Department of Justice treats every human life the same. We made a federal case out of the murder of a drug-user who lived in a poor neighborhood. Bringing Johnell Greene's killer to justice was just as important as any other case on which we worked.

Every victim matters. Every time violence occurs in our community, a family is left shattered, and a neighborhood suffers. Violence affects poor communities and the families of drug dealers in the same manner it affects a rich family that lives in a gated community.

IV. Conclusion

I want to close by looking forward. I want to assure this community that equal justice will be pursued and dispensed by this office and this Department. I want everyone here, everyone watching or listening, everyone reading about today's sentencing in the newspaper to understand and appreciate that

commitment. If you are a victim of violent crime, we will treat your case with the same level of importance no matter what color your skin may be, where you live, where you went or go to school, or how much money you have. We are committed to providing equal justice for all people in this community.

Thank you all for coming, we will now take any questions you may have.